

Effects of Drugs and Alcohol on Stress

Using Drugs and Alcohol to Relieve Stress

We need help recovering from stressors such as illness, a break-up, financial difficulties, or academic failure. Unfortunately, some students turn to alcohol or other drugs to relieve tension and pressure, failing to realize that such substances compound the stress reaction. If you or someone you know uses alcohol or other drugs to “calm down,” consider the following information, and consider a new strategy.



Understanding Stress

Stress is a non-specific physiological response to a demand. Stress may manifest itself as fatigue, muscle tension, headaches, depression, grouchiness, and/or burnout. People are more likely to become ill or have difficulty concentrating during or after a stressful period. This is true whether the stressor is positive or negative. For example, if you get a new job, you might feel excited about the challenge and the cash, but your body will still need to recover from the added strain of working.

How Drugs and Alcohol Affect Stress

Some drugs speed you up by stimulating the central nervous system, which can cause an elevation in blood pressure, heart rate, respiratory rate, and body temperature. Alcohol slows you down because it is a depressant, and thus slows your reaction time and motor skills, as

well as your ability to think clearly. These substances share one thing in common: they put additional stress on the body. So using drugs or alcohol as a way of getting rid of stress is counterproductive: it prevents what you may be trying to accomplish.

As poisons, drugs and alcohol can harm your immune, circulatory, and nervous systems. Since drugs and alcohol can make functioning properly very difficult, other problems can surface which introduce new stressors, such as losing a job, destroying a relationship, or causing a car accident.

Know the Effects of Chronic Drug and Alcohol Use

Drugs and alcohol are poisonous to the body and have caused serious damage. Addictions are progressive: that is, they tend not to stop on their own, but get more and more troublesome. Some users may find that one drink no longer has any effect, and even when they are drunk, they don't feel the same euphoria that they used to feel. Or the drug that helped them forget, now forces them to focus all their energy on getting more drugs.

Find a Solution

Drugs and alcohol can't help get rid of stress and in the long run will only make stress more pronounced. Instead, learn and adopt stress reducing techniques, reach out to friends, or see a counselor—these are more likely to help you cope with stress and contribute to your overall health.

Adapted from "Drugs and Alcohol- They Aggravate Your Stress" 1989 Parlay International

